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SUBJECT: SHUNNED KUWAITI EDITOR FEARS FOR SAFETY
AFTER BLASTING THE PM IN A RECENT WEB ARTICLE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Mohammed Abdul Qader Al-Jassem, Al Hurra talk show host and the liberal former editor-in-chief of the Arabic daily Al-Watan, complained to Emboffs of receiving threats after posting a scathing article on his website on December 10 criticizing Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Al-Jassem told Emboffs that for the first time he genuinely feared for his safety. In a more conciliatory article posted on December 17, Al-Jassem defended his previous article and declared his determination to keep writing, though he was far less critical of PM Shaykh Sabah. This kind of open criticism of the Government, particularly Shaykh Sabah, is unprecedented and crosses many unwritten red lines in Kuwait's conservative society. End summary.

PM Has Nothing New to Offer Kuwait

¶2. (U) In a December 10 article entitled "Deal and Honoring" posted on his website, liberal political activist and former editor-in-chief of Al-Watan newspaper Mohammed Al-Jassem claimed that Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah "will not rest until he becomes the 'official' ruler of Kuwait." Al-Jassem argued, however, that "Kuwait would gain nothing" if Shaykh Sabah was appointed as Amir since the Prime Minister has "consumed and exhausted all the ideas and energy he has" over the past three years. He continued: "If Shaykh Sabah becomes Amir it should be viewed as merely an honorific gesture, because his appointment will not lead the country to an era of renaissance. Shaykh Sabah has no new ideas and is too old to introduce serious changes in the management of the country."

¶3. (U) Al-Jassem insisted that Shaykh Sabah's appointment as Amir should be part of a "package deal" in which a Crown Prince and Prime Minister, who would assume the responsibility for governing the country, would also be named. He stressed that, as Amir, Shaykh Sabah should stay away from the day-to-day management of the country's affairs. Al-Jassem claimed that such a deal would be supported by National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, the controversial elder of the Salem branch of the Al-Sabah family, and would unify the ruling family behind its senior Shaykhs and close "the door of succession" for the longest period possible.

Three Possible Up and Comers

¶4. (U) Al-Jassem suggested Foreign Minister Shaykh

Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Advisor Shaykh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, and former Minister of Finance and Minister of Communications Shaykh Dr. Ali Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah as the most qualified candidates for the positions of Crown Prince and Prime Minister. The three Shaykhs, he wrote, are distinguished for their political and financial ethics and "their political records indicate that they are in favor of freedoms and democracy." Al-Jassem argued that Minister of Energy Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahd Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah should be completely ruled out as a potential candidate because of his alleged involvement in numerous scandals.

Scathing Article Provokes Threats

¶5. (SBU) This article was the apex in a series of articles Al-Jassem has written recently criticizing the Prime Minister, whom he blames for rampant government corruption. After posting this article, Al-Jassem and his close contacts told Emboffs that he received serious threats for "crossing the red line in his criticism." While he has complained about receiving threats before, this time Al-Jassem seemed genuinely concerned for his safety.

Next Article Still Defiant, But More Conciliatory

¶6. (U) In an article posted on December 17, Al-Jassem adopted a more conciliatory tone, admitting that he was harsh in his criticism of PM Shaykh Sabah. He defended his comments, however, saying

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that the way Shaykh Sabah runs the country, "with all the power in his hands," is wrong. He also stated his determination to continue writing regardless of the consequences.

Bio Note

¶7. (U) Al-Jassem currently hosts a weekly program, Al Majles, on Al Hurra. Previously, he was Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the Arabic -daily Al-Watan from 1994 to 1996 and Editor-in-Chief from 1997 to 2005. He claims he was forced to resign under pressure from Shaykh Sabah who disliked his political views. During the 2003 parliamentary elections, Al-Jassem provoked several ruling family members by accusing them of direct interference in the elections. Some observers have accused Al-Jassem of being a mouthpiece for the Salem branch of the ruling family in its disputes with the Jaber branch, a charge he flatly denied in his December 17 article. Al-Jassem publishes weekly articles on his Arabic language website which averages more than 1,000 hits a day. He is also a lawyer and owns his own firm.

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